



Northumberland
County Council



Care Leavers Strategy

2023 - 2025





CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Which Young People are Care Leavers?	3
National Context	3
Local Context	4
Northumberland Adolescent Service	4
NAS Services.....	5
Support to Young People with SEND.....	5
Support to Young People with Disabilities	5
Our Performance	6
The Local Offer for Care Leavers	6
Young Person’s Feedback.....	7
Care Leavers Covenant	9
Key Priorities and Actions	10
Promoting the Health & Well-being of Care Leavers	10
Promoting Accommodation & Placement Stability	11
Promoting Education, Employment & Training	11
Promoting Financial Stability	12
The Local Offer for Care Leavers	12
Promoting the Participation and Voice of Young People within Northumberland	13
Reducing the criminalisation of Young People	13
Overview of services within Northumberland Adolescent Service	13
NAS Health Hub	15
Exploitation Leads within NAS.....	15



INTRODUCTION

In Northumberland, we want all children and young people to live happy and healthy lives that enable them to grow and thrive. As a good corporate parent, we want to raise the aspirations of young people in our care, by supporting them to fulfil their own ambitions and dreams by helping them to overcome the difficulties they may face.

We work with young people, their families and carers, as well as partner agencies to ensure young people achieve and excel in relation to education and training, and that they have the necessary life-skills, confidence and experience to enable them to thrive in adulthood.

Which Young People are Care Leavers?

For a young person to be considered a care leaver, they need to be aged between 16 and 25, have been cared for by the local authority for a period of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and have left care sometime after their 16th birthday.

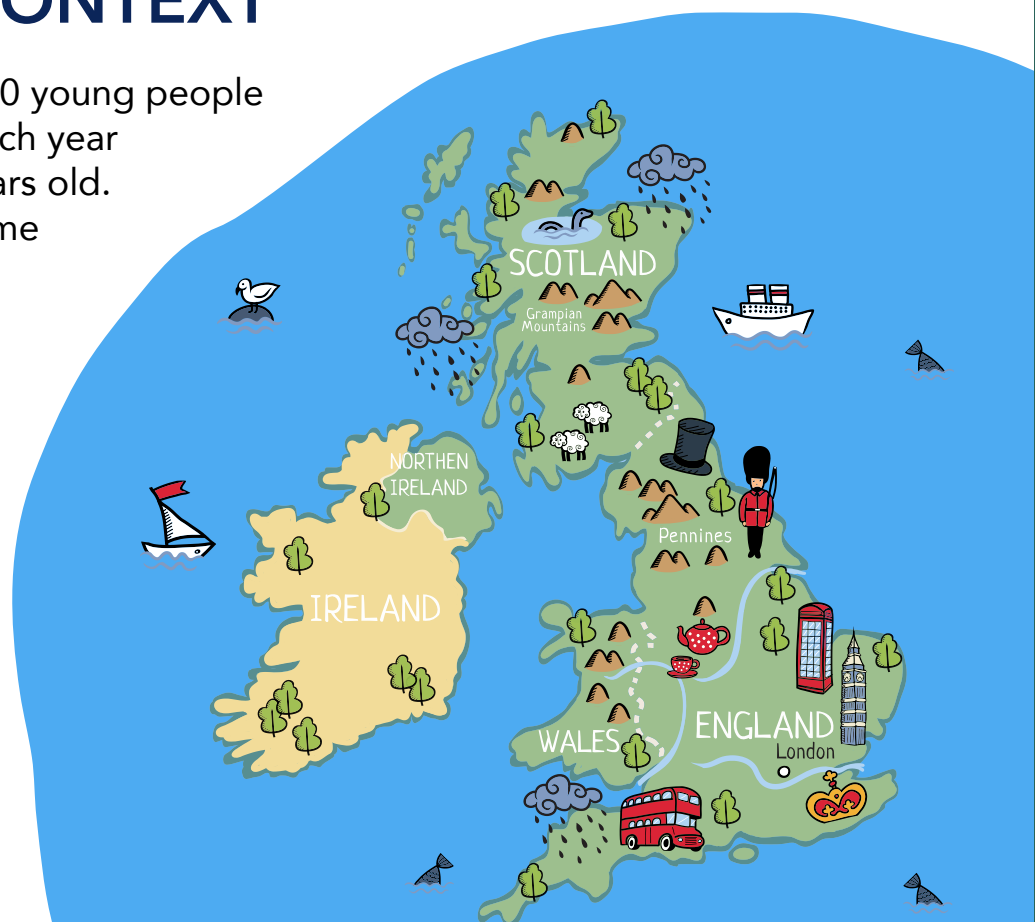
Support to Care Leavers

To meet the wider needs of care leavers and care experienced young people in Northumberland a collaborative approach is used, involving Northumberland Adolescent Service (NAS), partner agencies and the Council. This ensures the best possible outcomes for our young people is achieved.

This strategy is part of the wider Northumberland cared for children and care leavers strategy which reflects the desire to holistically support young people leaving care and sets out the plans to further improve the support we offer to young people. It provides a framework for the Council, elected members, officers and partners to fulfil our duties and responsibilities as corporate parents of care leavers.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Nationally, around 14,000 young people leave care in England each year aged between 16-18 years old. They generally leave home at a younger age and may experience a more difficult journey towards adulthood than their peers.



LOCAL CONTEXT

As of 31st March 2023, Northumberland County Council were actively supporting 179 care leavers across various teams within Children's Services. 48 young people were aged 17-18 and 118 young people were aged 19-21. The Service also supports 13 young people aged 22 to 25 years. For those young people closed to the service a yearly birthday card is sent to each young person which also advises them of their entitlement to re-access services up to 25 where they need support.

In 2013, The Department for Education set out its vision for care leavers, in which it said that care leavers should expect the same level of care and support that other young people get from their parents.

The Department for Education wanted to remove some of the practical barriers that care leavers face and they outlined the principles of good corporate parenting. "Keep On Caring" (2016), further cemented the support young people should receive as they transition from care. 'Keep on Caring' identified 5 key outcomes that the government believe young people leaving care should be supported to achieve:

1. All young people leaving care should be better prepared and supported to live independently.
2. Improved access to education, employment and training.
3. All young people should experience stability in their lives and feel safe and secure.
4. Improved access to health support.
5. Care leavers should achieve financial stability.

These 5 key outcomes form the basis of our strategy and provide a holistic approach to the support we offer to young people leaving care.

Further research was undertaken by the Government seeking the views of care experienced young people, seeking to understand their views about being ready for independence. In the report "Ready or Not: Care Leavers' views of preparing to leave care" (2022), young people identified the following key points:

- They left care too soon and often abruptly.
- They left care without the key skills to live independently.
- They felt isolated and lonely at times.
- Most felt that they should have a PA before they turn 18.
- They wanted professionals involved in their life that were genuinely interested in them.
- They needed more support around money management.

Based on the feedback from young people in this report, services will incorporate the views of young people in the wider service delivery plans ensuring young people are appropriately supported as they transition towards independence.

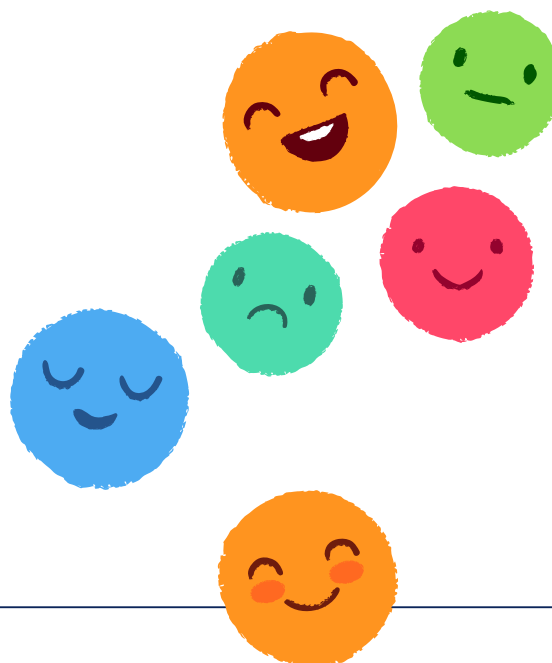
Northumberland Adolescent Service

Northumberland Adolescent Service (NAS) is a multidisciplinary service offering support to young people 14+ including children in need, cared for young people and care leavers.

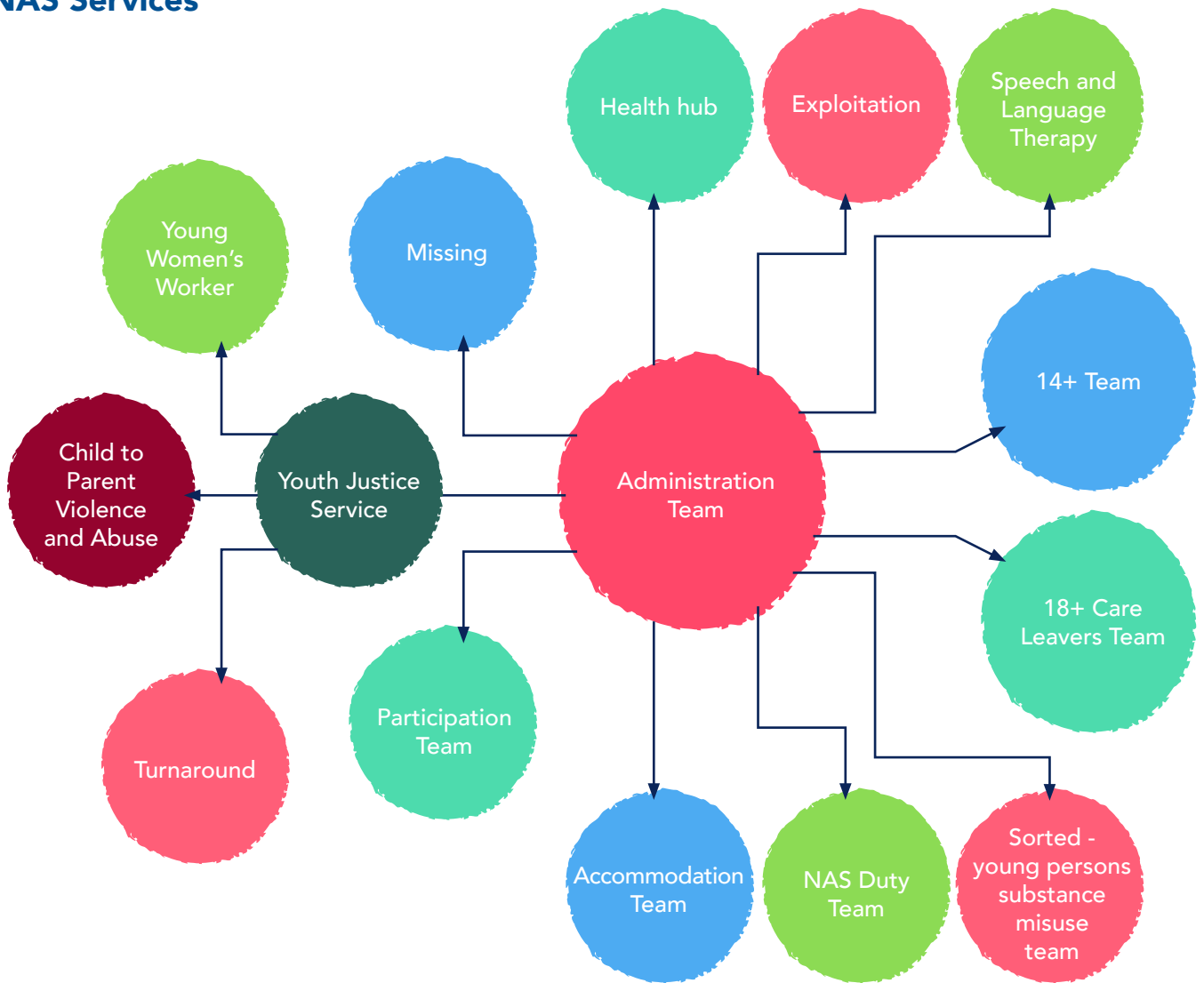
The 14+ Team and the 18+ Team for care leavers are co-located, which ensures there is a seamless transition between the teams when a young person turns 18.

The Service includes:

- 14+ Social Work Team
- 18+ Team for Care Leavers
- SORTED Substance Misuse Service
- NAS Health Hub
- Youth Justice Service
- Missing & Exploitation
- Participation & Advocacy Service
- Accommodation Service



NAS Services



Having the range of services co-located with a single overarching lead enables a shared responsibility to ensure that all young people receive a holistic service that meets their needs and promotes effective communication and joined up working between the individual services.

When the young person reaches the age 17 years and 6 months, they are assigned a Leaving Care Worker, who will work alongside the Social Worker until they are 18. They will support the young person in their life choices and provide them with practical support.

As a service, we will work with young people to determine their on-going support needs beyond the age of 21, recognising that the needs of young people vary considerably at this age and where appropriate and in line with a young person's wishes, the support of a Leaving Care Worker can be extended or re-accessed up to the age of 25.

Support to Young People with SEND

The service works in partnership to ensure that the needs of young people SEND are appropriately supported to transition into adulthood and that the appropriate support and guidance is offered.

Support to Young People with Disabilities

As a service we acknowledge that some of our care-experienced young people have disabilities and may have specific needs that require on-going support from specialist services such as Adult Social care and the Disabled Childrens Team.

We work alongside these agencies to provide an allocated leaving care support worker, who can support with the pathway planning and providing advice around entitlements a young person may have; such as access to the Setting Up Home Allowance and other support under the NAS Finance Policy.

OUR PERFORMANCE

Across 2022/2023, 52% of our 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers were in education, employment and training (EET), in comparison to the England average of 55%, statistical neighbour (SN) average of 53% and regional average of 52%.

97% were in suitable accommodation, in comparison to the England average of 88%, SN average of 91% and the regional average of 90%.

The Local Offer for Care Leavers

As a County Council, we are committed to ensuring that young people leaving care have access to advice and guidance around their entitlements and support available to them.

This information is included within the local offer and the key elements of the offer are to provide advice and guidance around:

- Health & Well-being
- Relationships
- Education, Employment & Training
- Accommodation

- Setting Up Home Allowance
- Participation in Society
- Practical Support
- Pathway Planning
- Care Leavers Rights
- Important Documents

To develop our local offer for care leavers, we have listened to what young people had to say about what we do and what is important to them. The feedback they provided helped us create the core offer to care leavers.



Young Person's Feedback

As a service we actively encourage feedback from young people and this can come from a variety of sources such as through the participation service and the direct work they do with young people as well as apps such as Mind of My Own. However, the main mechanism used by young people is the young person's feedback form, which young people can complete at any given time:



“They have listened to me.”

“They understand.”

“Showed me safety life tips.”

“Making sure I'm safe. Listening to me when I felt unsafe and put plans in place to make sure I feel safe again.”

“Well the worker I have now talks to me and doesn't judge me, she makes time to listen to me and accepts that some things make me upset or angry and works through them with me. Before the help wasn't good because I'd be told what I was doing and I wouldn't be asked for my opinions.”

“The best way social services has helped me is by giving me a life my parents couldn't and making sure they can do whatever I have needed.”



“I feel safer and I feel like I have someone there.”

“I like the amount of money you get from setting up home.”

“Helping me with my mental health and making sure I have a better support network.”

“Help with moving on and to succeed in life.”



Young Person's Feedback (continued)

“ I felt well listened to and also respected as my worker is really confident and that's a key skill to have. I feel like there is a lot of respect between me and my worker, I feel like I trust her enough with concerns and feelings. My worker has sorted things out that I've been wanting to do for a long time that is my opinion, is a massive help/good experience.

“ They helped me when I moved into my own flat, it was a bit daunting and I wasn't sure I would be able to manage but I've been in here nearly a year and its going well. They helped me to contact suppliers and council tax and made sure I was on the best tariff and its really helpful not having to pay council tax.

“ It makes me soooo happy that I now have my own place now and nobody can bother me in there and it helps my mental health sooo good I feel like my life going to be sooo good in there and I really appreciate all of you especially what you done for me 😊

“ I feel like my social worker listens to me. My social worker has made me feel happier in myself. I've had all the support from my social worker after not having the best start.

“ Supportive worker who contacts me regularly, has applied for things that help my current situation (food vouchers) and checks on my wellbeing regularly 😊. Worker was very helpful with advice with housing and helping me get my own place.

“ Helped me in understanding the opportunities I have about moving into somewhere on my own.



CARE LEAVERS COVENANT

The Care Leavers Covenant is a promise made by private, public or voluntary organisations to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently and reflects the key outcomes mapped in Keep On Caring (2016).

The aim of the Care Leavers Covenant, to which organisations commit, is to provide additional support over and above the statutory local offer for those leaving care, making available a different type of support and expertise as young people move forward successfully to the next phase of their lives.

Within Northumberland, the covenant will offer a range of additional support to young people leaving care.

This will include:

- Bespoke leisure offer, supported by Active Northumberland, giving care leavers free and reduced-price access to sports and leisure centres within Northumberland.
- Free access to travel passes for care leavers across Northumberland and the North East.

- Health Hub supporting the health and well-being of care experienced young people.
- Enhanced apprenticeship opportunities within Northumberland County Council and additional support to seek opportunities with employers outside of Northumberland County Council. The Virtual School are part of the strategic and operational groups for the NHS Universal Family Project and collaborate with NHS colleagues to match NHS jobs with our care experienced young people.



KEY PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

Within Northumberland we have identified the following key priorities for the service ensuring that young people are fully supported to aspire and achieve.

Promoting the Health & Well-being of Care Leavers

It is known that care experienced young people's outcomes are significantly affected by their exposure to childhood Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's). In order to help improve the health outcomes for young people leaving care, particularly around mental health and trauma, care experienced young people will have access to a Health and Well-being practitioner who will offer low level interventions and signposting to relevant services related to emotional and mental health. They will also provide advice and guidance to staff as young people transition from Children's Services to Adult Services, ensuring a seamless transition.

We know that a high proportion of young people leaving care experience challenges with language and communication. The NAS Speech, Language and Communication Support Team work with young people and their supporting adults to identify those who may have ongoing speech, language or communication needs (SLCN) and work with them to offer communication support and to ensure that they have a voice as they make their transition to adulthood.

To support the early identification of on-going support needs into adulthood, a transitions panel is routinely held and chaired by senior management within Adult

Social Care to discuss young people who may need on-going support from adult social care post 18.

Staff from Northumberland Adolescent Service attend the panel to share information with a view to suitable services and resources being identified in a timely manner, to meet the needs of the young person, this can be both from a mental health aspect as well as general social care needs. This will ensure there is a transitional system in place so that those young people requiring adult service support in any area will be referred to the most appropriate service to avoid delay for those young people approaching 18 years.

We will also ensure that a young person's health passport and pathway plan enables them to understand how they can promote their own health in the future by adopting healthy lifestyle choices.

Where there are any concerns regarding substance use, care experienced young people have access to in house harm reduction advice and guidance from a specialist 18+ substance misuse worker via the Sorted service.



Promoting Accommodation & Placement Stability

Care leavers are a vulnerable group of young adults who have particular needs in relation to housing and homelessness. Therefore Northumberland are committed to ensuring that young people are fully prepared as they make this transition to independence, supporting them to have all the skills necessary to live independently.

In 2022/2023, 97% of Care Leavers in Northumberland lived in suitable accommodation, in comparison to the England average of 88%. In order to increase our aspirations for all young people to have access to suitable accommodation, we have set a target of 95% for 2023/2024 and this target will be reviewed on an annual basis.

As part of our wider placement stability priorities, we aim to improve the number of young people accessing 'Staying Put' arrangements as well as developing a 'Staying Close' offer for young people.

We have a Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Protocol (CLASP) in place, with housing services to promote the advice and guidance young people receive when transitioning to independence.

Within Northumberland Adolescent Service we also have an accommodation service that seeks to support young people as they transition towards independence. We can offer floating support to young people as they move into their own tenancies, working alongside their

leaving care support worker, as well as offering support around developing their independent living skills and have begun to offer more 1:1 support around independent living skills via the use of the tenancy outcome star.

The service also offers supported tenancies which act as a stepping stone towards independence, enabling young people to develop the skills they need to live independently in a supported environment where they receive floating support from staff within the accommodation service, tailored to their individual needs.

The service is also in the process of developing an in-house supported lodgings scheme which will increase placement sufficiency and give more choice to young people as they transition towards independence.

As part of the wider remit of the regional care leavers board, work is on-going within Northumberland County Council with our colleagues in Housing to look at:

- Extending the age of priority for care leavers up to 25 supporting access to housing support and priority banding under Homefinder.
- To consider how we reduce/move away from the use of intentionality decisions when a young person is presenting as homeless.
- To develop a rent deposit/insurance scheme that can support care leavers who need this support to access housing.

Promoting Education, Employment & Training

On a national level, the educational attainment of care leavers continues to be lower than those of their peers. In 2022/2023, 52% of Northumberland's care leavers were in education, employment or training (55% England average).

Care leavers are also less likely to achieve good GCSEs (level 5 or above). In 2022/2023, 33.3% of Northumberland's children continuously cared for by the Local Authority for 12 months achieved the basics (grade 4 or above in English and maths GCSE) in comparison to 65.1% of all children nationally.

It is a priority that young people leaving care receive the support they need from schools, colleges and universities to maximise their educational attainment and employment opportunities.

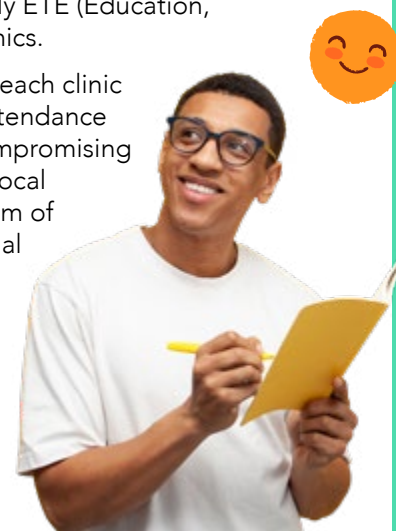
From September we are now completing PEPs (Personal Education Plans) with all Year 12 and Year 13 children in care and care leavers, to support their future aspirations and ensure robust planning and monitoring around the young person.

Employment and training not only provide the best route out of poverty, it also delivers positive life opportunities. Having a job or accessing appropriate training provides structure, a sense of purpose,

progress, achievement, encourages self-confidence and personal responsibility for young people.

In order to improve the opportunities available to young people, we recognise that it is also important to ensure that young people receive additional support to enable them to progress through learning and into sustainable employment. Therefore, through support and partnership with other agencies and council departments, we aim to increase the number of care leavers who are in employment, education and training, a key part of this is the monthly ETE (Education, Training and Employment) clinics.

Chaired by the Virtual School each clinic has a 14+ Team Manager in attendance and is made up of a panel comprising of key agencies and relevant local authority professionals. The aim of the clinic is to discuss individual care leavers – via their 14+ workers, who are NEET and explore opportunities available based on their needs and interests and action point to move into ETE.



Promoting Financial Stability

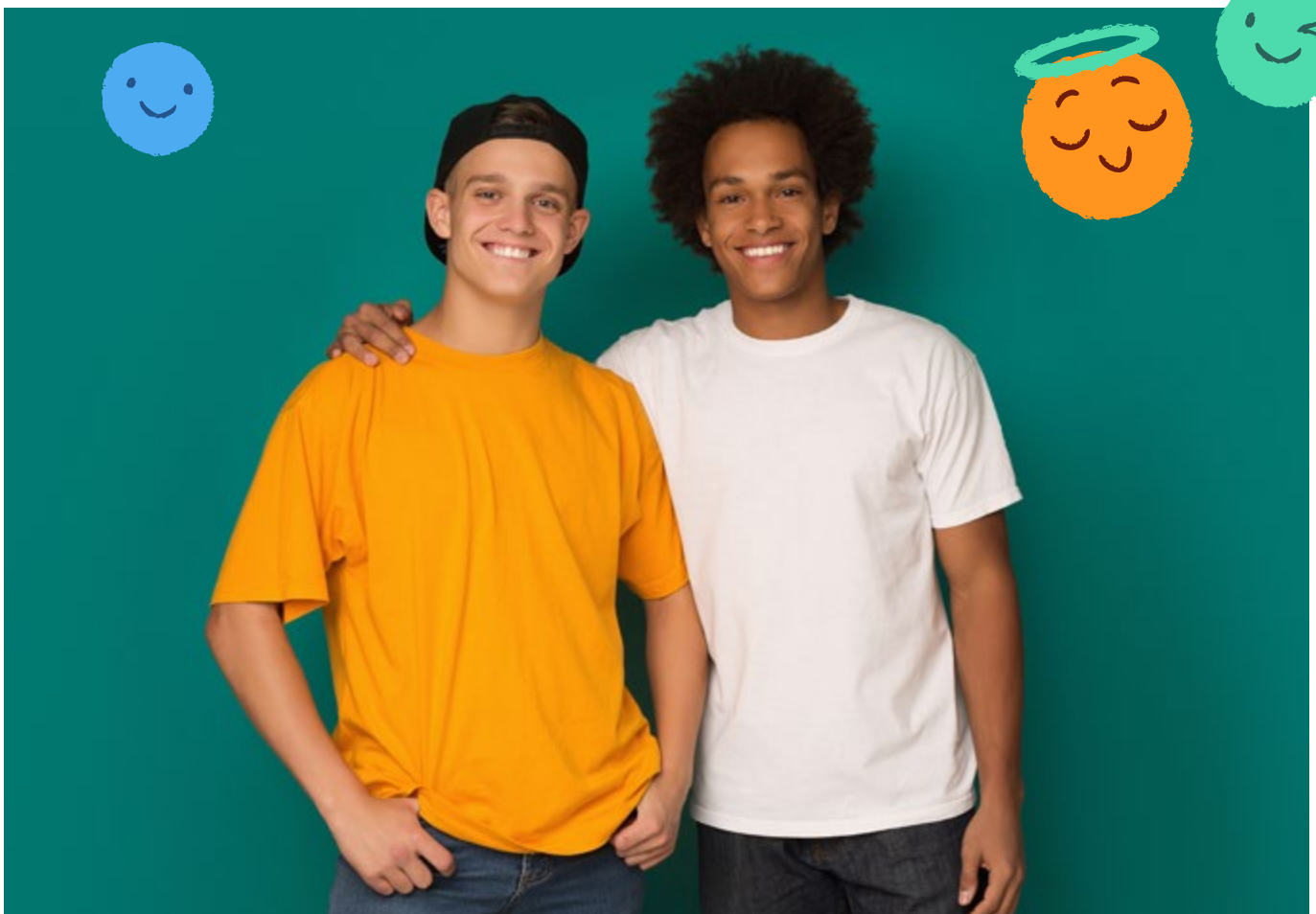
For young people transitioning to independence one of the biggest hurdles they need to overcome is the ability to manage and budget their finances appropriately.

In order to promote the financial stability of young people, work around independent living skills will take place prior to a young person leaving care, ensuring young people receive financial support and guidance, so that they are able to manage their income and reduce the risks of falling into debt.

The use of the Tenancy Outcome Star is currently being trialled within the service to help better prepare young

people for independence and allows for discussions and actions to be devised around key areas of independence living including:

- Housing
- Money and rent
- Looking after your home
- Health and well-being
- Positive use of time
- Community and contribution.



The Local Offer for Care Leavers

As a service we are committed to working with both internal and external partners to provide a robust local offer to care leavers and are working in partnership with the regional care leavers board to develop a consistent offer to all young people in the North East region.

Within Northumberland, we are able to offer care experienced young people the following:

- Access to a setting up home allowance (£3,000) to support young people as they transition to independence.
- Priority banding via Northumberland Homefinder, Choice Based Lettings Scheme.
- Access to free local travel in partnership with Nexus.
- Access to a leisure pass via Active Northumberland which offers reduced rates for activities and classes.
- Access to identification documents such as a passport, driving licence and birth certificate.
- Access to 10 driving lessons and costs for theory and practical tests.
- Health and well-being support via the Health hub & Sorted.

Promoting the Participation and Voice of Young People within Northumberland

The Children and Young People's Strategic Participation Group aims to enable children and young people to have a voice that informs decisions and to be proactively involved in the delivery of those decisions. We will ensure that:

- Children and young people will be proactively involved in strategic and political decision making to inform policy and delivery.
- Service delivery and policy will respond to the views of children and young people and will be based on their views, needs and aspirations.
- Children and young people will be proactively involved in the implementation and delivery of the participation strategy and are able to drive forward individual projects that matter to them, which is then feed into the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Group, which has oversight from the Directors and Senior Managers within Childrens Social Care and Lead Council Members.

Reducing the criminalisation of Young People

We recognise that young people who have been in care can be particularly vulnerable as they transition into adulthood, particularly if they are in the criminal justice system.

They are also particularly vulnerable to the risk of being drawn into crime or exploited by others, for purposes of committing crimes. As a wider county council, Northumberland has established a local multi-agency protocol that seeks to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of cared for children and care leavers.

As a service, we want to give young people the best chance possible to succeed in life. As a good corporate parent this includes ensuring that as far as we are possibly able we prevent cared for children and care leavers from entering the criminal justice system.

Where cared for young people are identified for offences within a care setting there are guidelines for care providers and police to follow in relation to the 10 point checklist to ensure all avenues of support have been tried prior to the police involvement and the need for more formal interventions through YJS.

As a service we work hard to support and divert young people away from offending and figures for 2022/23 indicate that we had 1 young person who was convicted (0.5% of those we support) which was less than the national and regional figure of 2%.

The protocol reflects the principles and ambition of the National Protocol on Reducing Criminalisation of Cared for young people and Care Leavers and sets out 'how' the national protocol will be implemented locally.

Overview of services within Northumberland Adolescent Service

SORTED (Substance Misuse) - Sorted are the substance misuse service for young people in Northumberland. The primary aim of the service is to provide direct harm reduction and interventions to young people who have complex needs regarding their substance use. Sorted also provide advice, training and support to professionals to raise awareness and reduce the associated risks from substance misuse with young people with whom they work.

Sorted have a dedicated worker to provide support to care experienced young people over the age of 18. The worker does this in two ways, 1) the worker acts as a personal assistant to young people where there are substance use concerns, 2) the worker liaises with adult treatment service to ensure young people receive the support they require.

Youth Justice Service (YJS)

The YJS work with young people (aged 10 to 19) with the aim of preventing them from offending, reoffending, and helping them to engage in activities to fulfil their potential.

The YJS is a multi-disciplinary service is made up of court workers, restorative justice workers, prevention workers, seconded police officers, a health and wellbeing worker, speech and language practitioners, a seconded probation officer, a young women's worker and child to parent violence and abuse workers. We know that young people that are cared for or care experienced are often at greater risk of becoming involved in the criminal justice system, therefore, through close multi-agency and partnership working, the YJS is committed to keeping crime low and diverting young people away from the criminal justice system.

When a young person is given an out of court disposal, or sentenced in the Youth Court/Crown Court, a youth justice service (YJS) worker will complete an assessment. Following this, an intervention plan based on the young person's strengths and assessed risk will be agreed with them and their family/carers.

Those young people who are aged 17 and over where involvement is likely to continue past the age of 18 will be allocated to our seconded probation officer who is able to support the transition to adult probation services where needed and appropriate. This function is also applicable to offering support in transitions to those young people who are care experienced.

Information sharing is a key part of the service and timely support is provided from police officers (PCs) who are seconded into the YJS. The seconded PCs also offer direct work and intervention with young people open to YJS.

The Turnaround programme is a prevention programme that offers support to families and young people aged 10-17 years old who have come to the attention of

police or anti-social behaviour teams. The programme can also work with young people who have been discharged or fined by court.

The young women and girls project is located within YJS, funded through the Home Office's Young Women and Girls Fund (YWGF). Its purpose is to improve services to young women and girls suffering gang related harm or exploitation, with a focus on understanding the specific and gendered risks that this poses. The project aims to ensure young women and girls can access the tailored, dedicated support they need and is able to be delivered around existing support that is place from other professionals, for example for those young women and girls that are cared for or approaching a transition into adulthood.

Interventions for families where child to parent violence and abuse (CPVA) is identified is also delivered by workers within YJS. Using an approach through the principles of Non-Violent Resistance (NVR), workers identify key areas of support for families with the focus on improving communication and relationships within the environment that a young person is living and with those that are responsible for their care.

14+ Team is a children's social work team based within the Northumberland Adolescent Service. They work with cared for children from the age of 14 and care leavers under the age of 18. The role of the team is to provide support to this group of young people whilst they are cared for in line with statutory requirements and provide pathway planning support as part of their transition to adulthood and independence. Each of our cared for young people will have a care plan or pathway plan which is updated a minimum of every 6 months or when there has been a significant change. This is to ensure that we have an accurate understanding of their current care and support needs.

They also work with young people 16 years and of post statutory school age where there is an identified need for ongoing children's services support under Child In Need, following a child and family assessment being completed. This is primarily supporting a young person who is experiencing homelessness, exploitation, substance misuse, mental health and/or family breakdown.

The 18+ Team provides advice, guidance and support to care leavers. This includes reviewing pathway plans with care leavers every 6 months (or when there is a significant change in circumstances). This ensures that this group of young people receive ongoing support as adults when they have left care up to the age of 25 years. This includes independent living, housing, ETE and Health support.

All young people involved with the teams receive health support and there is a designated cared for health team who carry out regular health assessments and provide health support, advice and guidance to young people.

The Accommodation Service - The Accommodation Service sits within NAS and works across children's services to meet the accommodation needs of young people. The service also supports care leavers at university and provides a supported accommodation provision that is registered with Ofsted. We also support young people through the completion of early help assessments and oversee the Joint Housing Protocol and the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Protocol.

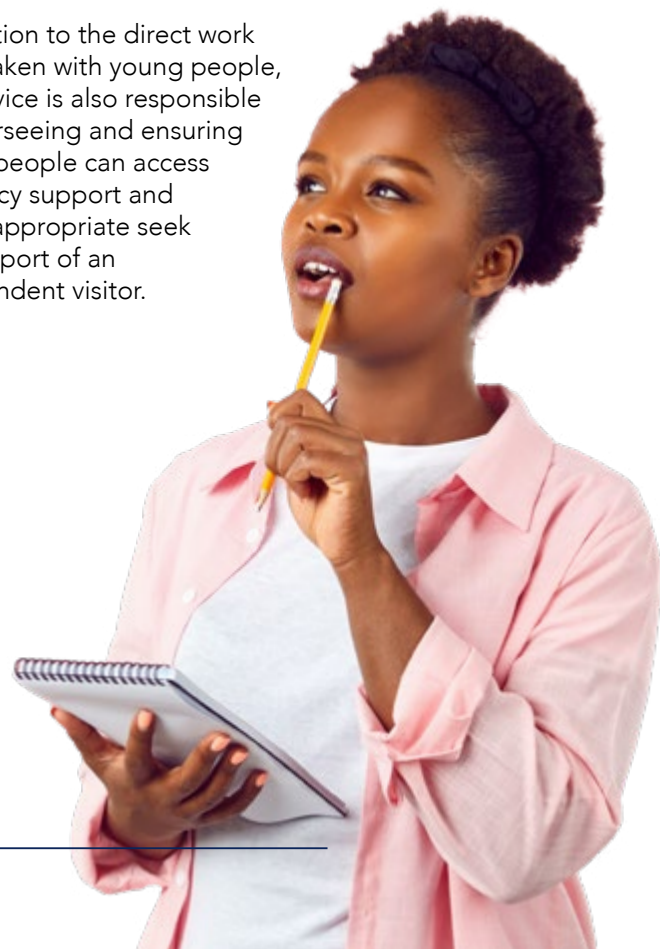
We accept accommodation referrals for young people who are:

- Child In Need 16+ (post school leaving age)
- Cared for young people 16+ (post school leaving age)
- Care Leavers

Participation Service – The participation service support young people to make their views and voice known about the services they receive. This is facilitated through the following avenues:

- **Voices Making Choice (VMC)** – fortnightly meetings held with cared for and care experienced young people who are supported to progress work on projects that they are passionate about as well as responding to government consultations around the delivery of services for cared for and care experienced young people.
- **Youth Parliament & Cabinet** – Young people supported to become members of the youth parliament and cabinet with a responsibility for ensuring the voice of all young people in Northumberland are represented on a local and national level.

In addition to the direct work undertaken with young people, the service is also responsible for overseeing and ensuring young people can access advocacy support and where appropriate seek the support of an independent visitor.





NAS Health Hub

NAS works alongside universal and targeted health services to ensure young people access the appropriate service to their needs. The NAS Health Hub aims to provide physical health and wellbeing support for young people who have experienced Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's) and who are open to one of the specialist teams within the Northumberland Adolescent Service.

The Health Hub is made up of specialist services, multi-disciplinary workers and Partner agencies aimed at improving the physical and emotional health of young people that come into contact with NAS Services.

Within the NAS structure we have Health and Well-being workers, who's role is to provide consultation, intervention and resources to young people and professionals within NAS, with the aim to promote and support positive mental and emotional health. There is an in-house Speech, Language and Communication Lead, who delivers a consultation and support service for young people known to NAS who have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and to the practitioners who support them.

Exploitation Leads within NAS

The exploitation leads provide advice and guidance to young people and practitioners open to NAS. The aim of the exploitation leads is to improve the overall outcomes for children and young people in Northumberland who have been affected by Child Exploitation, Modern Slavery and Trafficking.

There are two exploitation leads who offer support around, mapping and strengthening multi agency working, case consultation and supervision, advice and guidance around disruption, resources and toolkits and the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process, as well as providing direct support to a child/young person and training to professionals.

CONTACT US

Northumberland County Council,
County Hall,
Morpeth
NE61 2EF

Telephone 0345 600 6400

Email northumberlandadolescentservices@northumberland.gov.uk

Website www.northumberland.gov.uk



If you need this information in Large Print, Braille, Audio or in another format or language, please contact us on:

Telephone 0345 600 6400

Typetalk 018001 0345 600 6400